Lavenham Guildhall wins lottery support

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The grant is part of a major project to update and redisplay how it tells its story, and how people locally can get involved with its work.

The National Trust's Grade 1 listed Guildhall of Corpus Christi in the picturesque Suffolk village of Lavenham was built in the 1520s on the back of the high profits of the booming woollen cloth trade. Within a generation though, not only had the cloth trade crashed leaving Lavenham an economic backwater, but religious guilds themselves had been abolished by King Edward VI. Over the centuries the Guildhall and its adjoining buildings have had a varied history including times when parts were a prison, a workhouse, and a Methodist chapel. Since 1951 the property has been in the care of the National Trust.

Chris Evans, a member of the National Trust's local advisory committee, commented: "Many of the displays and interpretation methods in the museum have stood us in good stead for a number of years, but we want to take the opportunity to put them into retirement and take a complete review of how we present the story of not just the Guildhall, but also that of Lavenham and its people in a way that is more enticing and engaging."

As part of the project, the National Trust will be creating new volunteering roles to help more people get involved with the work of the Guildhall, and building stronger links with local schools, community groups and organisations.

Jane Gosling, the National Trust's Guildhall Manager, said: "One the common threads throughout the story of the Guildhall is that despite its many differing uses, it has always been a place that has been used by the community – and that continues to this day. Amongst others, some of the new volunteer roles that are planned include opportunities for people to use, or develop, their skills in conservation, marketing, and guiding."

The scope of the work and the story the Guildhall will be researched and developed further over the rest of the year, with the property aiming to reopen in Spring 2014.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: "The history of Lavenham and the stories of its people are embedded in this wonderful building. We are delighted to support this project that is a great way or bringing the interesting tales to life."

The benefits of the funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund will also go further than just re-presenting the Guildhall Museum and developing participation in it. Whereas once the fortunes of Lavenham were dependant on the cloth trade, today tourism is a key aspect of the village's economy.

Tim West, chair of the Lavenham Merchant's Guild, explained: "This funding will not only help build the links locally with the day to day work that goes on at the Guildhall, but as it is so central in our tourist trade, by improving the overall experience it offers, we will ensure that visitors will keep returning. In turn this benefits all of us across the village, from the Guildhall itself to the shops, galleries, restaurants, businesses and residents."

Notes to editors

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Further information

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